

Party members voting for another party: Belgium and the UK in comparison

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1. Introduction¹

The last few decades, political parties in Western democracies are often described as being in crisis. Especially the party branches in relation to civil society (i.e. the ‘party on the ground’ (Katz & Mair, 1993)) appear to encounter difficulties. This becomes apparent, among others, from a decline of trust in parties (Dalton & Weldon, 2005) and reduced levels of party identification (Dalton, 2002) leading to increased levels of electoral volatility (Drummond, 2006). As such, the linkage function of parties is put under pressure: citizens no longer recognise parties as trustworthy intermediaries that channel their demands to government officials, and consequently they do not remain faithful to a party in the ballot box.

Party members are sometimes seen as a means of protection for parties in crisis. Although they also bring costs (such as less freedom of manoeuvre due to their ideological firmness and financial costs for member administration), party members continue to be valuable for parties as they constitute a stable voting base, they act as ambassadors for the party, they capture signals from society and communicate them to the party elite, they provide the party with financial resources by paying membership fees, and finally, they constitute a pool of potential candidates and mandate holders for the party (Scarrow, 1994).

However, even this last resort of hope for waning parties seems to be eroding. First, the number of party members is declining at a steady pace in all countries across Western Europe (Van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014; Whiteley, 2011). As a consequence, the number of people that could engage in the above-mentioned functions decreases, which potentially impedes their successful fulfilment. Secondly, it is often taken for granted that party members vote for the party they belong to. Recent research, however, suggests that considerable segments of party membership bases behave disloyally by casting a vote for another party (Polk & Kölln, 2016). As such, even the assumed ‘loyal’ and ‘vote-multiplying’ party members (Scarrow, 1994) do not necessarily provide an antidote against the increased

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levels of voter volatility from which parties across Europe are heavily suffering (e.g. Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Drummond, 2006).

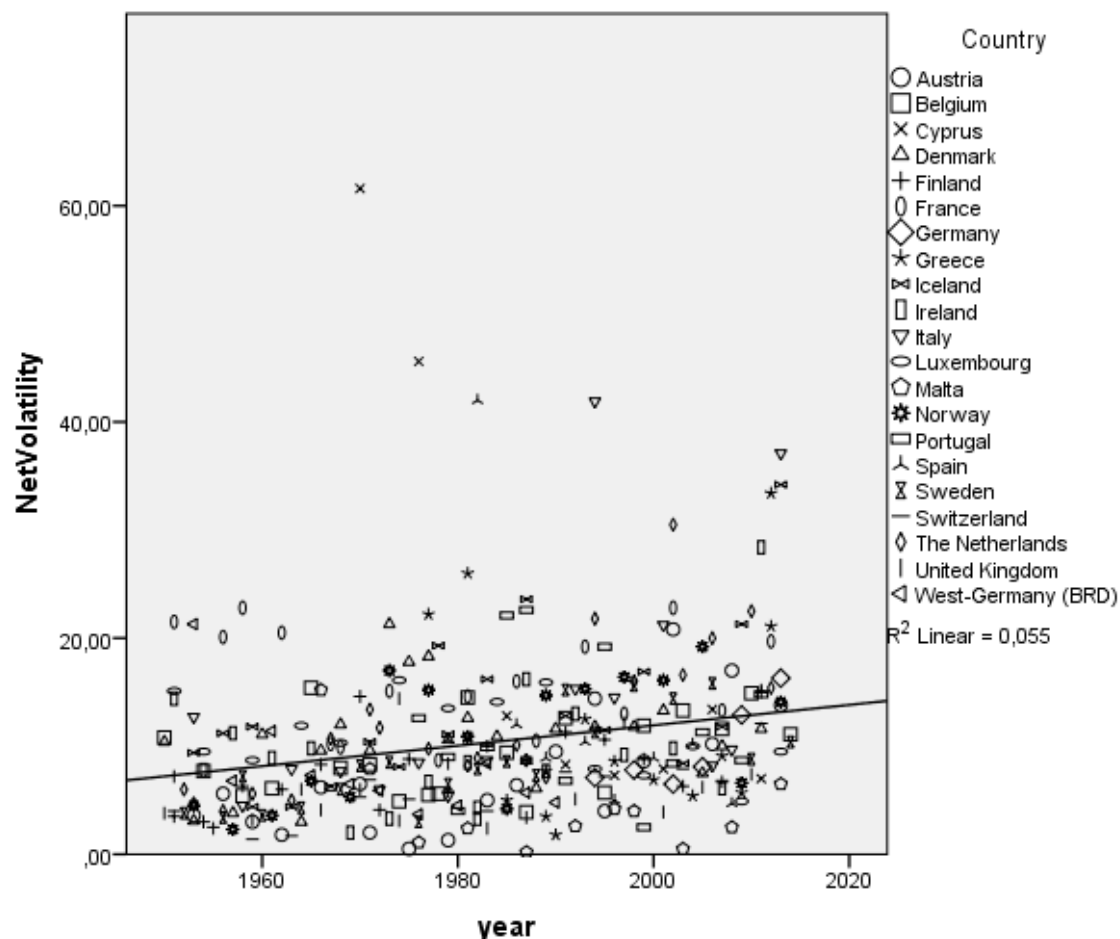
In this paper, we intend to further explore this latter element. We will map out the share of disloyal party members that cast a defecting vote in elections and, more importantly, we aim to further extend our knowledge on why they do so. We try to explain this phenomenon by taking into account both programmatic, leadership and strategic considerations. The programmatic considerations are approached both as 'push factors' (referring to dissatisfaction with the own party) and as 'pull factors' (referring to the 'attractiveness' of competing parties). Moreover, broad-scale surveys conducted among party members in Belgium and the United Kingdom allow us to study disloyal party members in comparative perspective, enabling us to uncover conditional effects of the party system and the electoral system. We more specifically expect that programmatic factors are of higher importance in Belgium than in the UK, as its highly fragmented multi-party system – as opposed to the UK's two-party system - decreases the ideological distance between parties.

In the next section, we will further describe the problem of electoral volatility and situate party members' role therein. Afterwards, we will develop several arguments why party members could defect from their own party when casting a vote, and how the party system has an influence on these factors. After describing the methodology, we test these arguments on data about party members in Flanders (Belgium) and Great Britain.

2. Electoral volatility and party members

One of the main indicators of their eroding bonds with the broader society is that political parties are suffering from high levels of electoral volatility (Dassonneville, 2012; Drummond, 2006). Voters no longer remain loyal to one single party but instead become more 'volatile' by voting for different parties in consecutive, or even in simultaneous elections. This lack of a stable voting base constitutes a major problem for parties since they have to win their voters back every election and because it becomes unclear which voters they actually represent and whose needs they have to take along in political debates (Andeweg, 2012).

Figure 1: Net volatility (measured by the Pedersen index) over time in a number of European countries (source: Dassonneville (2015))



The most often used indicator for electoral volatility is the Pedersen (1979) index. This index calculates the net percentage of voters who changed their vote compared with the previous elections. For each party, the absolute differences between current and previous election

results are calculated. All these differences are summed and divided by 2. Although criticised because it does not take into account mutual fluctuations at the individual level² (Katz, Rattinger, & Pedersen, 1997), an important advantage of this index is that it provides a clear view of evolutions of volatility over time and allows for cross-national comparisons. Figure 1 shows that aggregate-levels of net-volatility, measured by the Pedersen index, are steadily rising in a large majority of European countries.

Apart from changes in the electoral and party system (Bartolini & Mair, 2007; Tavits, 2008), also individual factors are said to influence voter volatility. One of these factors at the individual level is party identification or partisanship, i.e. the extent to which citizens identify themselves with a particular party. It is believed that party identification - and party membership as a very strong form of party identification - protects parties against this increased voter volatility. One of the earliest research traditions on voting behaviour, that of the Michigan School, focused on party identification as the most important explanation for the choice for a party in elections (Bartels, 2000; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). The basic idea is that a large share of citizens identify themselves as a supporter of a party and remain loyal to that party and its candidates when casting a vote. Partisanship could here be considered as group belonging, comparable with social or religious identity. Although there is scientific controversy on whether levels of party identification have really decreased over time (Bartels, 2000; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2016; Rosema, 2006), there is consensus that also due to cognitive mobilisation, partisanship is no longer a main factor for the explanation of voting behaviour. It has been partially replaced by more short-time considerations such as opinions on current topics and candidate evaluations. Rather than exclusively relying on long-term identifications and party socialisation, voters now tend to decide for which party they vote more autonomously than in the past (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2016).

Party membership could be considered as a formal and far-reaching form of party identification. It is formal because people formally register to become a member, pay a membership fee and receive a membership card. This goes much further than just

² However, also at the individual-level survey-based measures point out trends of increasing voter volatility across Europe (Dalton, McAllistar, & Wattenberg, 2002)

identifying oneself with a particular party. It is also far-reaching not only because party members are expected to vote for their own party, but also because they perform some 'vote multiplying' functions (Scarrow, 1994) by encouraging others to copy their voting behaviour. They can do so by personally convincing their friends and relatives, by distributing leaflets and other campaigning material or by becoming a candidate themselves (Bale & Webb, 2015). Van Aelst, van Holsteyn, and Koole (2012) even label party members as *part-time marketers* for the party. In this sense party members are not only relied upon for their own votes, but also for the votes of those in their personal and geographic environment.

Based on this premise, it comes as no surprise that a strong link between the number of party members and electoral results has been found in Belgium. The share of party members belonging to a party the year before the elections appears to be a good predictor for the election result of that party in the subsequent year (Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2012). A similar phenomenon was observed in the UK, although a straightforward relationship between members and obtained votes could not be found for all parties (J. Fisher, Denver, & Hands, 2006). This suggests that, even in times of membership decline and professionalised electoral campaigns, party members continue to function as an important linkage mechanism between parties and voters, and still have a large influence on voting behaviour.

This stable reservoir of votes appears nonetheless to be under pressure. A major threat is that the number of party members is declining all over Western Europe (Van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012). Moreover, it cannot be taken for granted that party members always vote for their own party. Looking at the European Social Survey (ESS) data, Polk and Kölln (2016) calculated that between 3 % (Finland) and 16 % (Israel) of the party members cast a disloyal vote in elections (see also Kenig and Rahat (2014)). This is an additional threat for parties: not only the number of party members is lower than ever, but a relevant share of these members appears to be disloyal. Thus, it seems that electoral volatility is a phenomenon that affects even party members, the most faithful of the voters. Even they might use cues different from their partisan affiliation when deciding for which party to vote for.

3. Explanatory framework

The aim of this paper is to explain why party members decide to cast a vote for another party at general elections. We put forward three possible explanations: programmatic considerations, personal evaluations and strategic considerations.

A choice for a particular party at the ballot box is, first of all, influenced by **programmatic considerations**. People vote for a party because the points of view or the issues that a party emphasises correspond with their own views and priorities (Bélanger & Meguid, 2008; Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989). Although it could be assumed that party members share the opinions of their party, this is not necessarily the case. May's law of curvilinear disparity (1973), for instance, posits that party members tend to be more extreme than the party elite. In their empirical analysis of Canadian and Belgian party members, van Haute and Carty (2012) estimated the share of 'ideological misfits' in each party between 10 and 25 %. This suggests that it is not uncommon that party members have views and preferences that diverge from those of the party (elite). Party members with diverging views could decide to either leave the party ('exit'), remain loyal ('loyalty') or raise their voice in order to change things ('voice') (Hirschman, 1970). Exit could be realised by giving up party membership which happens indeed because of ideological disagreement (Wagner, 2016) but it could also be a more temporary exit option by voting for another party.

The distinction made by Polk and Kölln (2016) between 'push' and 'pull' factors is particularly useful for analysing the effect of programmatic considerations on vote defection of party members. When the ideological distance between a party member and his party is large, that party member might be pushed to vote for another party in elections ('push' factor). But it might also be the case that another party is highly attractive since their points of view correspond quite closely with those of members of that first party that cast a disloyal vote ('pull' factor). Unlike Polk and Kölln (2016) who only take anti-migrant attitudes into account as pull factors, we analyse the effect of the distance on a general left-right scale both between party members and their own party ('push' factor) and between party members and the most nearby other party ('pull' factor). We formulate two hypotheses:

H1: Party members with a large distance to their own party on a left-right scale are more likely to cast a defecting vote ('push' factor)

H2: Party members with a small distance to another party on a left-right scale are more likely to cast a defecting vote ('pull' factor)

Owing to processes of personalisation (Aarts & Blais, 2011; Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina, 1987; Karvonen, 2010) in the last few decades, **evaluations of individual candidates** have become more important for voting decisions. Party leaders are particularly important in this perspective as they are often automatically associated with the party and, as such, have a large impact on the electoral result of their party (Balmas, Rahat, Sheaffer, & Shenhav, 2014; Wauters, Thijssen, Van Aelst, & Pilet, forthcoming). Since party leaders are temporarily in charge of the party, it seems likely that party members dissatisfied with the party leader will stay on board as member (in the hope that one day the party leader will resign) but might once (or as long as the party leader is in function) cast a defecting vote. Aarts and Blais (2011) demonstrated that positive leader evaluations matter more for voting behaviour than negative evaluations. We focus on the evaluation of the own party leader and expect that the more positive party members evaluate their party leader, the less likely it will be that they cast a defecting vote.

H3: Party members who evaluate their own party leader as very positive are less likely to cast a defecting vote

Finally, we discuss **strategic considerations**. Voters, including party members, might prefer one party but vote for another either because they believe that their preferred party will not obtain any seats, or in order to bring a particular government majority to power (Gschwend, 2007). This is called a tactical or strategic vote (S. D. Fisher, 2004).

Although it is often assumed that strategic voting only occurs in majority electoral systems in order not to waste votes, it has been demonstrated that strategic votes can be cast also in systems of Proportional Representation (PR) (Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2012). Strategic voters in PR systems mainly aim to influence the coalition formation by voting for large parties who have a better chance of ending up in government (and to weigh on the decision-making

while in power). The consequences are the same, as also smaller parties tend to be victims of this strategic behaviour.

H4: Party members from smaller parties are more likely to cast a defecting vote

This brings us to another important aspect in this paper. Party switching is not only influenced by individual-level variables, but also by factors at the institutional level. We highlight two aspects of the political system that are relevant for explaining disloyal voting behaviour of party members: the party system and the electoral system. We will explain that Belgium and the UK differ on both aspects, allowing us to estimate the conditional effects of these political system variables on the chance to cast a disloyal vote.

We start with the **party system**. Dejaeghere and Dassonneville (2015) have demonstrated in a cross-national study that the number of parties and the degree of polarisation in a party system have an impact on the chance of voters to switch parties at elections. While the former factor has a positive effect on vote switching, the latter has a negative one. The reasoning behind the positive effect of the number of parties is that the chance to find a party that deserves a vote is higher when there are more parties available. Another argument is that the ideological distance between parties is lower in systems with many parties (Tavits, 2005). This is also an argument that underpins the polarisation argument: in polarised systems ideological differences between parties tend to be larger, and hence the chance to switch is lower (Dejaeghere & Dassonneville, 2015). In addition, in polarised systems parties are more likely to be built upon social cleavages. Voters changing their voting behaviour not only move away from their party, but also from their social group (class, religious group, etc.) which forms the basis for party formation (Bardi & Mair, 2008; Lijphart, 1969).

In Belgium's highly proportional electoral system, many parties compete for voters' support and hence, it is reasonable to expect that substantive and ideological party differences are smaller in Belgium than in a majoritarian country such as the UK (Bouteca, 2011; Walgrave & De Swert, 2007). This is confirmed when we look at the 'effective number of parties', an indicator introduced by Laakso and Taagepera (1979) taking into account both the number

and the strength of parties in a party system. In the last UK General Election in 2015, the effective number of parties that obtained votes is 3.9, and this figure is reduced to 2.5 if we only take into account parties that obtained seats. In Belgium (as a whole), in the 2014 election these figures are 9.6 and 7.8 respectively, much higher than in the UK (Döring & Manow, 2016). Even when we calculate only the effective number of parties for the regional Flemish Parliament, these are clearly higher than in the UK with 5.1 and 4.5 respectively. In sum, the effective number of parties is larger in Flanders than in the UK, and hence we could expect that ideological differences with a neighbouring party are smaller. Thus, we expect that ideological considerations will play a more limited role in the UK than in Belgium

H5: Ideological considerations are less important for party switchers in the UK than for Belgian party switchers

Belgium and the UK also differ in the **electoral system** they use. While Belgium uses a flexible list PR-system, the UK has a single-member plurality system. This has consequences in terms of proportionality between vote shares and seat shares. While in a PR system the explicit purpose is to maximise correspondence between both shares, a plurality system first and foremost aims to create a clear and stable government majority based on territorial representativeness (Duverger, 1954; Lijphart, 1990). As a consequence, the level of disproportionality is much larger in plurality systems than in PR systems. This is confirmed when looking at the Gallagher (1991) index of disproportionality. For the most recent elections in Belgium (2014) this index is 4.7, while in the UK the score of this index is 15.0 (Döring & Manow, 2016). Larger disproportionality creates higher disadvantage for smaller parties and make strategic voting more likely (Crisp, Olivella, & Potter, 2012; Gschwend, 2007). Moreover, a tactical vote in PR systems (which is rather about coalition formation) is less likely since it presupposes more voters' knowledge: government and coalition formation are harder to understand and require more information (Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2012). Thus, members of smaller parties will tend to vote strategically more in the UK than in Belgium.

H6: Strategic considerations are less important for party switchers in Belgium than in the UK.

4. Methodology

In order to test our hypotheses, we rely on broad-scale surveys conducted among party members of five parties in Flanders (Belgium) and six parties in the United Kingdom. In contrast with cross-country surveys, which are conducted among the entire population (instead of only among party members) and mainly contain general questions, these surveys among party members allow us to investigate their opinions and voting behaviour in detail.

In the course of 2012, we conducted a postal survey among party members of the Flemish-regionalist party N-VA and the liberal-democratic OpenVLD in Belgium, using the Total Design-method (TDM) of Dilman (1978). The same method was used one year later to survey party members of the Christian-democratic party CD&V and the ecologist party Groen, and again in 2015 for the social-democratic sp.a.³ Despite following the same method, response rates varied from one party to another (see Table 1). N-VA members recorded the highest response rate with 65.5%, whereas for OpenVLD (whose membership file suffered from several inaccuracies) we obtained a response rate of only 28.9%. In order to control for underrepresentation, the data were weighted according to sex and age category.

Table 1. *Party members survey details, five Flemish parties*

Party	Type of party	N	Total response rate	Period: start	Period: end
Groen	Ecologist	931	62.0 %	23 April 2013	16 June 2013
Sp.a	Social-democratic	583	38.9 %	10 June 2015	14 October 2015
CD&V	Christian-democratic	666	44.3 %	21 March 2013	12 June 2013
OpenVLD	Liberal-democratic	430	28.9 %	9 May 2012	9 September 2012
N-VA	Regionalist	990	65.5 %	3 April 2012	14 September 2012

In May 2015, one week after the UK's General Election, with the help of YouGov, an international internet-based market research firm, we conducted an online survey with British⁴ party members of the Conservative party, the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats,

³ Apart from these five parties, there is one other Flemish party represented in parliament, i.e. the extreme right Vlaams Belang, but they refused to cooperate in a survey.

⁴ Northern Ireland party members have not been included.

the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the Greens and the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) (See Table 2). YouGov recruited the survey respondents from a panel of around 300,000 volunteers who are paid a fee of 50p for completing a survey. Upon joining the YouGov panel, volunteers complete a survey asking a broad range of demographic questions which are subsequently used to recruit respondents matching desired demographic quotas for surveys. Potential respondents for the party member survey were identified from questions asking respondents if they were members of any of a list of large membership organisations, including the political parties. At the beginning of the fieldwork period some 8840 YouGov panellists who were party members were invited to take part in the poll, and 5696 respondents subsequently took part in the survey, effectively a response rate of 64.4%. Although results reported in this article are not weighted in any way since there are no known official population parameters for the various party memberships in the UK data triangulation gives us confidence in the quality of the data ⁵.

Table 2. *Party members survey details, six British parties*

Party	Type of party	N	Period: start	Period: end
Conservative	Conservative	1192	12 May 2015	26 May 2015
Labour	Social-democratic	1180	12 May 2015	24 May 2015
Lib Dem	Liberal-democratic	730	12 May 2015	26 May 2015
UKIP	Eurosceptic and right-wing populist	784	12 May 2015	25 May 2015
Greens	Ecologist	845	12 May 2015	23 May 2015
SNP	Nationalist and social-democratic	963	12 May 2015	23 May 2015
Total Response rate: 64.4%				

The central dependent variable of our analysis is a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not a party member has voted for his/her own party in the last general elections (0 = vote for the own party ; 1 = vote for another party). Only party members who casted a vote for

⁵ Previous YouGov party membership surveys using unweighted data have generated predictions for party leadership contests that came very close to (that is within 1% of) the final official outcome. Further validation was provided by comparing demographics of our UKIP sample with those generated by a far larger UKIP survey (n=13568) conducted by Paul Whiteley and Matthew Goodwin using a mailback method on the UKIP membership population. We are grateful to Professors Whiteley and Goodwin for facilitating this.

one of the parties at the last general elections are included in the analysis. We will conduct a logistic regression model.

As for the independent variables, for the programmatic ‘push’ factors we rely on a comparison (i.e. the absolute difference) between the score of party members on a self-placement left-right scale (0-10) and their placement of the party on the same scale. For the programmatic ‘pull’ factors, we do the same, but compared to the most adjacent other party⁶. So, for instance, if a Labour member places him or herself at 4, and Labour at 5, Greens at 2 and SNP at 1, the distance between his/her self-placement and his/her placement of the party will be 1 (i.e. $5 - 4$), whereas the distance with the most adjacent other party will be 2 (i.e. $4 - 2$)⁷.

For factors related to leadership evaluations, we asked Belgian party members to express the sympathy they feel for their current party leader on a scale from 0 to 10. Similarly, we asked to British party members to express how they feel their party leader performed in the electoral campaign on a scale from 0 to 10. And finally, for strategic considerations, we take the size of the party into account, i.e. the share of votes they obtained in the last general elections (for which party members did (or did not) cast a disloyal vote).

In order to control for the effect for other variables, we also include sex, three age categories (15-34; 35-65; 65+), education level (graduates vs. non-graduates) and level of party activism into the regression model. The latter is measured with a factor score resulting from country-specific factor analyses of campaign, selection and policy activities⁸.

⁶ The ideological distance to the most adjacent party includes the SNP only in Scotland, since it is not possible to vote for the SNP in England or Wales.

⁷ If the same member also place the SNP at 2, there are two most adjacent parties, but this does not affect the calculation of the ideological distance that remains 2.

⁸ The following party activities were included in the factor analyses in both countries: taken party in the selection of party leader, delivered leaflets, stood for office within the party organisation, helped at a party meeting and displaying election posters. All activities load on the same factor of party activism.

5. Results

We will first discuss the results of the descriptive analyses of disloyal voting behaviour of party members. The goal of this analysis is to map the extent to which members cast a defecting vote. Next, we will present the results of an explanatory logistic regression analysis that allows us to test the hypotheses we formulated above.

5.1 Descriptive analysis

Although most party members still vote loyally for their own party, it becomes apparent from Table 3 that both in Flanders and Britain disloyal voting behaviour is not a negligible phenomenon. On average, about 6 per cent of the surveyed party members did not vote for the party they are member of in the preceding elections. At first glance, the share of disloyal party members seems to be higher in Britain than in Flanders but only when we take into account all British parties, and not only those who won the highest number of constituencies (Labour, SNP, Conservatives).

Table 3. *Voting behaviour of Flemish and British party members (% per party)*

	Groen	SP.A	CD&V	Open Vld	N-VA
Own party	96.0	92.2	95.1	93.9	94.3
Other party	4.0	7.8	4.9	6.1	5.7

	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	UKIP	Greens	SNP
Own party	96.2	95.1	87.9	93.1	84.2	96.2
Other party	3.8	4.9	12.1	6.9	15.8	3.8

Indeed, when we take a closer look at the table above, then outspoken differences between British parties strike the eye. Parties encountering difficulties to gain seats in Britain's majoritarian electoral system (the Greens and Liberal Democrats in particular) exhibit much higher shares of defecting votes (15.4 and 12.1 per cent respectively) than mainstream parties (Conservative (3.8 %) and Labour (4.9 %)). In Flanders, we do not observe similar differences between small and large parties. Strategic voting considerations might be a

possible explanation for these differences. In PR systems (used in Flanders), the risk of gaining no seats is much smaller for minor parties, and hence strategic voting is less prevalent. These results hence already seem to confirm our expectations as formulated in H6.

5.2 Explanatory analysis

In the next sections, we test the possible explanations for disloyal voting behaviour in a more systematic way. For this purpose, we conduct a logistic regression analysis on the individual level with whether or not a party member has voted for another party as the dependent variable.

Table 4. Logistic regression for Flemish and British parties with casting a defecting vote as dependent variable

	Flemish parties			British parties		
	B	Std Err.	Exp(B)	B	Std Err.	Exp(B)
Ideological distance own party (push factor)	.164**	.054	1.178	.159***	.046	1.172
Ideological distance adjacent party (pull factor)	-.209*	.099	.812	-.109**	.039	.897
Sympathy/Performance score for own party leader	-.214***	.042	.807	-.239***	.021	.787
Vote share most recent elections	.013	.012	1.013	-.028***	.005	.972
Level of education (graduate degree)	-.064	.181	.938	-.090	.118	.914
Age (65+ as reference)						
15-34 years old	-.055	.277	.946	-.327	.168	.721
35-65 years old	-.039	.207	.961	-.450**	.144	.638
Sex (women)	.026	.181	1.027	.063	.124	1.065
Activity rate in the party	-.757***	.126	.469	-.503***	.070	.605
Constant	-1.629	.412	.196	-.021	.321	.979
	R ² = 0.11 N=2880			R ² = 0.10 N=4924		

*** p < 0.001 ; ** p < 0.01 ; * p < 0.05

The results show a highly similar pattern for Flemish and British parties. First of all, programmatic considerations indeed appear to play a role in deciding to vote for another party. Both 'push' factors (the perceived ideological distance to the own party) and 'pull' factors (the ideological distance to the most adjacent party) have a significant effect on the chance to cast a disloyal vote. These findings lend support to H1 and H2. This means that members who perceive a larger distance between their opinions and those of their own party, and members who estimate the distance between their opinions and those of another party to be small, are more likely to vote for another party. We also hypothesised that because of differences in the party system, programmatic considerations would play a larger role in Flanders than in the UK (H5), but the analysis gives only very limited evidence for this. The odds ratios for the ideological distance to the own party are almost identical for Flemish and British parties (1.178 versus 1.172). Odds ratios for the ideological distance to the most adjacent party are slightly higher in Flanders than in the UK, but differences remain rather small (0.812 versus 0.902). This allows us to reject H5. Consequently, ideological differences seem to play a role in disloyal voting behaviour irrespective of the party system in which parties operate.

Secondly, also evaluations of individual candidates, and of party leaders in particular, affect the chance of casting a defecting vote in a significant way. Although the formulation of the questions differed slightly between Flemish and British parties (general sympathy question versus a question about leadership performance), the sizes of the effects are again to a great extent similar (odds ratios of 0.807 versus 0.788). This means that we find support for H3 stating that party members who evaluate their party leader more positively are less likely to cast a disloyal vote.

As for the strategic considerations, we do find that these also have an impact on defecting voting behaviour, but only in the UK. Party members of smaller parties have a significantly greater chance of voting for another party than members of larger parties. This is not the case in Flanders, where the vote share of the party has a small positive, but non-significant effect. This corresponds with the findings in Table 3, and leads to a confirmation of H6.

Finally, we discuss the effects of the control variables. Activity rate in the party has a significant effect both in Flemish and British parties: more active party members have

smaller chances of voting for another party. This effect is larger in Flanders than in the UK (odds ratios of 0.469 versus 0.605). Socio-demographic variables do not have a significant effect on disloyal voting behaviour, except for age in the UK where middle-aged people have a lower chance to vote for another party compared to people older than 65 years old. Moreover, also the p-value of the coefficient for the group of 15-34-year olds (who are less likely to cast a defecting vote than the elder party members) is extremely close to the conventional levels of significance ($p = 0.051$). Although young party members in Belgium seem to demonstrate a lower chance of voting for another party too, these effects are not significant.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we examined the loyalty of party members by describing and explaining their voting behaviour in general elections. In the light of increasing levels of electoral volatility, party members are often seen as a beacon of stability for parties: they generally portray high levels of (formal and far-reaching) party identification and subsequently provide the party with some guaranteed electoral support, both by casting a vote for the party themselves and by persuading others to follow their lead.

Our findings in Belgium and the United Kingdom, however, show that the loyalty of party members is not absolute nor unconditionally. Although most party members continue to vote for their own party, a relevant share appears to cast a defecting vote in the ballot box. Our figures largely correspond with the findings of Polk and Kölln (2016) but provide some more detail with regards to differences between parties. In Flanders, the share of disloyal party members varies between 4.0 and 7.8 per cent; among British parties there is more dispersion, with percentages ranging from 3.8 to 15.6 per cent.

When trying to explain party members' defecting voting behaviour, we took into account programmatic, leadership and strategic considerations. The latter only appeared relevant for British party members whose voting decisions are partially shaped by the incentives provided by the majoritarian electoral system. The programmatic and leadership considerations, however, appeared equally important for both countries. Party members tend to cast a vote for another party when they feel that there is a large distance between their own ideological orientations and those of the party, or when they feel that other parties are closer to their own orientations. Also when they are dissatisfied with the (performance of the) party leadership, party members are more likely to cast a defecting vote. In that sense, (disloyal) party members do not differ that much from other voters, who similarly increasingly let their voting choice depend on short-term factors as evaluations of party programs or party leaders, rather than on long-term factors as party identification and socialisation (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2016). This undermines the idea of party members as antidote against electoral de-alignment.

Although our research design does not allow us to make bold statements about evolutions over time, these findings might still be of concern for political parties. Not only does a

relevant share of party members cast a defecting vote in elections, this choice is often prompted by dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs within the party. When this temporary 'exit option' (Hirschman, 1970) turns into a permanent one, this might lead to additional party membership decline in the future.

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